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ABSTRACT

To adequately reflect the complexity of the U.S. West or any region, it is useful to represent the landscape through a variety of media and perspectives. Teachers need to supply the framework necessary to sustain a discourse about various media. These lesson plans are intended to be taught as part of a ninth or tenth grade English course. The creation of film, painting, photography, short stories, travel narratives, novels, and music all require decisions regarding content and scope. The discussion of each media is meant to inform the next. The unit is divided into two sections: (1) "Regional Literacy: Reading Controversy; Contradiction in the American West"; and (2) "Visions of the American West: Three Lesson Plans" (Travel Narrative as Text; Photography as Text; Film as Text). The lesson suggests beginning with an open-ended writing prompt, asking students to identify which medium appeals to them the most and why. Each lesson cites grade levels; offers an introduction; states educational objectives; notes time required and materials and preparation needed; addresses prior knowledge; details a step-by-step procedure; and suggests an extension, enrichment, and assessment procedure. (BT)

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Seeking a Landscape: Visions of the American West

by Patricia E. Kettler

SO 034 304

Perceiving the American West: Expectations and Outcomes
2001 Institute

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II. Visions of the American West: Three Lesson Plans

Travel Narrative as Text

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These lesson plans were developed as part of a four-week summer institute held July 8-August 3, 2001 on the campus of the University of Colorado, Boulder. The institute was funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities and offered by SSEC in collaboration with the Center of the American West at the university.

Regional Literacy:

Reading Controversy and Contradiction in the American West

Introduction

The American West is a region rich with controversy and contradiction. In the high school language arts classroom, teachers rarely have the chance to focus on multiple perspectives of one region. Teaching the American West in the American East poses an inherent deficiency: the inability to personally interact with western soil. The absence of soil, however, can be substituted with representations of the landscape. To adequately reflect the complexity of the West or any region, it is useful to represent the landscape through a variety of mediums and from a variety of perspectives.

To successfully teach a topic through a variety of mediums, teachers need to supply the scaffolding necessary to sustain a discourse about those mediums. Students need the ability to identify and comprehend mediums, to apply the terms used in a discussion of the mediums, and to analyze, synthesize and evaluate the methods used in the creation of those mediums. The terms can be taught as an integral part of a unit covering a range of forms of expression. For example, while teaching a lesson on Dorothea Lange's "Migrant Mother Series" to a group of students who are not familiar with the discourse on photography, it is possible to integrate the use of photography terms within the context of the lesson itself. As a further method of integration, it would be beneficial to connect photography terms to literary terms and to specifically look for where the methods used in the creation of photography and writing intersect, overlap, and where they diverge. We can ask students to consider what photography can accomplish

that writing cannot and what writing can accomplish that photography cannot. We can consider both the potential and the limitations for expression within each medium.

Why a multi-media unit?

Using multiple forms of media mirrors the complexity of perspective required to portray a single region. In searching for a way to teach about a complex region rich with history and revisions of history, it makes sense to use a multi-dimensional approach. How can one convey something three dimensional through two dimensional means? Portraying a variety of perspectives through a variety of mediums creates a layered approach to understanding people and place and is thus reflective of their interplay.

In the for-profit work world, financial reward is integral to successful management, yet job satisfaction also requires a personal investment. In the classroom, successful management principles dictate that students need to be personally invested in their academic experience. Teaching a multi-media unit can help to create a personal investment for some students. How? If a student feels a personal connection to photography and is in a classroom where connections are consciously made between photography and other mediums, it is more likely that the student will develop an appreciation for the other mediums. If students can feel personally invested in their education beyond grades, they are more likely to succeed both intellectually and academically.

How does multi-media unit fit in the language arts classroom?

The multi-media world we live in requires "media bilingualism" – the ability to converse fluently about different forms of expression such as film, photography, painting, music, literature, and poetry. Within the field of education, there is a movement toward

expanding the definition of what makes a "text." Literacy no longer refers only to being able to read the written word but now encompasses "reading" film, painting, music, and photography. Literacy, in this case, refers to having a certain level of fluency within a particular subject, fluency in thought and in the ability to articulate ideas.

How does this unit, *Seeking a Landscape: Visions of the American West*, reflect these multi-media, multi-layered ideas?

Seeking a Landscape: Visions of the American West is intended to be taught as part of a ninth or tenth grade English course. The variety of genres and mediums enables students to converse fluently about the mediums individually and to make connections between the mediums as forms of artistic expression. The creation of film, painting, photography, short stories, travel narratives, novels, and music all require decisions regarding content and scope. Parallels exist between what the writer chooses to describe and what the photographer chooses to frame. In this unit, the discussion of each medium is meant to inform the next. One way to begin the unit is with an open-ended writing prompt asking students to identify which medium appeals to them the most and why.

Photography, "Migrant Mother Series"

Creating a photograph consists of imprinting an existing image onto film using light. The variables that affect how the final product turns out include the exposure, film speed, filters, lenses, type of film (black and white or color), and the developing and printing processes. The photographer consciously selects how to frame the image, how to create the composition, essentially choosing what to leave in and what to leave out. This concept -- conscious inclusion and exclusion of material -- is the behind the creation of painting, of writing, of film making, of writing music. One major purpose for

photography, as with the other mediums, is to tell a story from a particular point of view and to evoke emotion in the viewer. Photography can be created solely for artistic purposes, yet it can also serve as a form of documentary, such as Dorothea Lange intended when she was hired by the U.S. government to take photographs of rural America.

Travel Narrative, *Travels with Charley*

A travel narrative conveys a person's encounter with a place; the encounter is largely determined by the expectations, prior knowledge, and psychological constructs brought to the place by the traveler. To say that travel writing is about place is an insufficient explanation; it is really about a person's interaction with and experience in a place. The travel writer has the ability to manipulate diction and syntax while deciding what details to include and which to leave out, much like the photographer's decisions about composition. John Steinbeck's *Travels with Charley* is a solid example of how the person informs the place and the place informs the person, the dual reflection being the key aspect of the overall experience.

Film, *Of Mice and Men*

In film, the director is able to convey a story using the visual frame; principles of film are similar to photography, but with the addition of sequencing, movement, and sound. In film, one second requires twenty-four still pictures, meaning that the director has to make that many more decisions regarding the visual composition. A film is different from a short story because the visual has to actually be shown rather than just described. While writers use imagery to evoke emotion, directors manipulate images. Cinematography, like writing and photography, can still only create the illusion of taste,

touch, and smell. In Gary Sinise's 1992 film version of *Of Mice and Men*, the director makes choices in what he portrays visually that differ from what Steinbeck originally created in his novel. While many of the scenes in the novel take place indoors, Horton Foote adapted the screenplay to have more outdoor scenes, thus taking into account the inherent need to retain the audience's visual interest.

Conclusion

The photographer, the writer, and the director all rely on similar principles in the process of creating a final product. Just as we teach students to invest in their own writing process, we should also teach them to understand in the processes that go into other mediums. The American West can serve as a backdrop for delving into these different forms of expression. We are all travelers, even to the places we think we know. Whether we were born in the West, are visitors, or are vicarious travelers, it is a region that lends itself to a new form of literacy: understanding people and place as one inextricable entity.

Additional pieces for multi-media unit:

Novel:
Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck

Poetry:
"American Sonnet" by Billy Collins
(Collins, Billy. *Sailing Alone Around the Room: New and Selected Poems.* New York: Random House, 2001.)

Painting:
"Chama Running Red" by John Sloan

Short Story:
"The Secret Lion" by Alberto Rios
(Kittredge, William, ed. *The Portable Western Reader.* New York: Penguin, 1997.)

Song:
"I Will Go West" by J.P. Barrett
(http://memory.loc.gov)

Additional resources:

Ascher, Steven & Pincus, Edward. *The Filmmaker's Handbook*. New York: Penguin Group,1984.

Dancyger, Ken & Rush, Jeff. *Alternative Scriptwriting: Writing Beyond the Rules*. Boston: Focal Press, 1991.

Eastman Kodak Company. *How to Take Good Pictures: A Photo Guide by Kodak*. New York: Random House, 1981.

Hortenstein, Henry. *Black and White Photography, A Basic Manual*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1983.

Kist, William. "Beginning to create the new literacy classroom: What does the new literacy look like?" *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* 43.8 (2000): 710-717.

Zinsser, William. *On Writing Well*. New York: Harper Collins, 1998.

Visions of the American West: Travel Narrative as Text

Grade Levels: 9 & 10

Introduction

This is one of several lessons in a unit which looks at multiple presentations of place as portrayed by the people who have encountered it. We will compare a variety of mediums to the travel writer's prose in comparison with what photographers and directors are able to accomplish with their mediums. We will purposefully look at the effects of what is included in a "travel narrative" and what is excluded.

Objectives

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Use the terms and definitions connected with the discussion of travel narratives.
2. Identify and incorporate the five steps of the writing process.
3. Analyze how elements of composition create the narrative (story) aspect in travel writing.
4. Delineate the similarities and differences in choices made by directors, photographers, and writers.

Time required

three class periods (based on block scheduling)

Materials and Preparation

1. Excerpts from *Travels with Charley* by John Steinbeck
2. "Writing About Places: The Travel Article" (116-132) in *On Writing Well* by William Zinsser
3. Attached rubric
4. Attached peer-critique sheet

Prior Knowledge

1. Use of term IMAGERY in writing

2. Use of the terms POINT OF VIEW, NARRATIVE, DICTION, and SYNTAX

Procedure

1. Class creates of web off of the word ***writing***. What are the different types of writing?

2. Teacher reviews steps involved in the writing process:
   a) brainstorming
   b) drafting
   c) revising
   d) editing
   e) publishing

3. Students read "Writing About Places: The Travel Article" (116-132) in *On Writing Well* by William Zinsser, a chapter on travel writing.

4. Based on their reading and own prior knowledge, students create a definition for travel writing as a genre.

5. Teacher gives textbook definition (to add next to their own) and reiterates points of article:

   a) don't tell us all the details -- choose the interesting ones

   b) descriptive detail should be the main substance

   c) tell us what made the trip different from everyone else's

   d) only tell us what we don't already know (e.g., we know the ocean has waves and the beach has sand)

   e) strive for fresh words and images

   f) "Subjective comments are in the eye of the beholder. One man's romantic sunrise is another man's hangover" (118).

6. Read excerpts from *Travels with Charley*. As they are reading, students should write down three quotations that they consider to be models of effective writing.

7. Ask students to share the quotes the copied over with the class. Make connections to major points from Zissner article (#5 above).

8. Teacher models cluster chart as a method for brainstorming ideas about own travel experiences.

9. Students create their own cluster charts.

10. After students have created cluster charts, direct them to:

    a) circle an idea from the cluster chart to be used as a focus for travel narrative

    b) write down circled idea at the top of a fresh sheet of paper and keep on desk

11. Lead students through in a guided-imagery exercise: mentally revisiting the place and remembering tastes, touches, smells, sights, and sounds (five senses).

12. Ask students to write down on the piece of paper every detail they can recall from the exercise.

13. Instruct students to begin the first draft of their travel narrative.

    Writer's Tip: If they are having difficulty deciding how to start the narrative, tell them to begin in the middle of the story.

14. Teacher distributes rubric.

15. After completion of draft, students peer-critique travel narratives using peer-critique sheet.

Extension / Enrichment / Assessment

1. Final draft of student travel narrative to be turned in with rubric

Travel Narrative: Rubric for Final Draft

name:
date:

Your TRAVEL NARRATIVE will be worth 40 points. grade: /40
Your grade will be based on the following factors:

	4	3	2	1	0
1. Did you write about a specific place?	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	None
2. Did you describe, in detail, what the place was like?	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	None
3. Did you tell a story (action)?	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	None
4. Do you tell *some* of the experience rather than all?	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	None
5. Do you tell us things that we don't already know?	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	None
6. Do you use fresh words and images?	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	None
7. Did you eliminate facts that are known attributes?	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	None
8. Did you provide concrete detail?	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	None

9. Does your travel narrative keep-the reader's attention?	4 Excellent	3 Good	2 Average	1 Poor	0 None
10. Did you follow through with all of the steps in the writing process?	4 Excellent	3 Good	2 Average	1 Poor	0 None

Travel Narrative: PEER REVISION

Questions for peer-revision

Writer: _____

Peer-Reader: _____

Date: _____

1. Does the writer use enough detail to make the travel narrative interesting? Yes / No

2. Are the details that are included significant? (In other words, do they help tell the story or detract from it?) Yes / No

Give three specific examples.

1)

2)

3)

3. Does the travel narrative actually tell a story? Yes / No

Map the main plot.

4. Does the writer use fresh words and images? Yes / No

1)

2)

3)

5. Does the writer avoid details that are known attributes, for example: "the sea has waves" or "the sun is bright"? Yes / No

If NO, give three examples and suggestions for how to change them.

1)

2)

3)

Visions of the American West: Photography as Text

Grade Levels: 9 & 10

Introduction

This is one of several lessons in a unit which looks at multiple presentations of place as portrayed by the people who have encountered it. We will compare a variety of mediums to the photographer's frame which will stand as a metaphor for perspective, purposefully looking at the effects of what is included in a "snapshot" and what is excluded.

Objectives

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Use the terms and definitions connected with the discussion of photography.
2. Analyze how elements of composition create the narrative in a photograph.
3. Discuss similarities between a photographer's choice of composition and a writer's choice of diction and syntax.

Time required

one class period (based on block scheduling)

Materials and Preparation

1. Handouts of cropped image and complete image of Lange's "Migrant Mother"
2. Copies of *Lange's Account of Photographing the "Migrant Mother" Series* from *Popular Photography*, Feb. 1960
3. Power point slide show of Dorothea Lange's "Migrant Mother" series & questions at end of slide show (http://www.ssecinc.org/Fset_projects.htm) Hard copies are attached.
4. Class set of slide show images & questions
5. Notes on use of composition in photography

6. Notes on the history of "Migrant Mother" series

Prior Knowledge

1. Use of term IMAGERY in writing

2. Use of the terms POINT OF VIEW, NARRATIVE, DICTION, and SYNTAX

Procedure

1. Ask students to write down anything they can think of that relates to photography; ask students to briefly describe a powerful photograph that they have seen and can remember vividly.

2. Hand out cropped image of Lange's "Migrant Mother" photograph; ask students to answer questions on handout. Discuss the nature of the "narrative" told by the photograph.

3. Hand out complete image of Lange's "Migrant Mother" photograph; ask students to answer questions on handout. Discuss the differences in the narratives told by each; are they different narratives or does the second simply add information to the first?

4. Hand out *Lange's Account of Photographing the "Migrant Mother" Series*, read, and have students answer question on handout.

5. Present lecture notes on overview of photography as an artistic medium while specifically focusing on composition.

6. Present Dorothea Lange power point presentation. Instruct students to do a thumbnail sketch ("visual notes") of each image as it is shown, write down an abbreviated caption from the slide show captions for each thumbnail, and write down three words that convey their reaction to the images presented.

7. Ask students to answer questions at end of slide show:

    a. Briefly describe how each photograph is different compositionally.
    b. Are these images (photographs) more or less powerful than the images (imagery) created through "Lange's Account of the Experience"? Explain how Lange's choice of composition is similar to her choice of diction and syntax.
    c. In what way do the captions add to the story told through the photographs?
    d. Based on these photographs and written descriptions from Dorothea Lange, what are your impressions of central California during the 1930's? How do these impressions reflect your impressions of the contemporary American West?

Extension / Enrichment / Assessment

1. Homework Assignment: Find a photograph from the newspaper or Internet. Write a one-paragraph description of the image and the point of view you think it presents and narrative it tells. Paste it to a larger piece of paper. Draw a two-inch wide frame around the picture. Using your imagination, fill in the frame with an illustrated extension of the picture on each side. Include something you think the photographer may have intentionally left out to tell a particular story.

2. Quiz given at the beginning of next class period on lesson 1 notes.

3. Discuss the ways in which a photographer's choice of composition is similar to a writer's ability to use diction and syntax.

http://lcweb.loc.gov/rr/print/128_migm.html

Photography as Text

EVIDENCE

What do you see in this photograph? What details do you notice about the subject? List only visual evidence -- what you see literally in the composition.

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

CONCLUSIONS

What is this woman's story? Who is she and what is she thinking about? (Write in complete sentences.)

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Photography as Text

http://lcweb.loc.gov/rr/print/128_migm.html

EVIDENCE

What additional information is given in this photograph that was not in the previous cropped image? List only visual evidence -- what you see literally in the composition.

1)

2)

3)

4)

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5)

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the additional information given in this photograph, how would you revise your previous interpretation of this woman's story? (Write in complete sentences.)

Lange's Account of Photographing the "Migrant Mother" Series

"The photograph that has become known as 'Migrant Mother' is one of a series of photographs that Dorothea Lange made in February or March of 1936 in Nipomo, California. Lange was concluding a month's trip photographing migratory farm labor around the state for what was then the Resettlement Administration. In 1960, Lange gave this account of the experience."

from *Lange's Account of the Experience*
(http://lcweb.loc.gov/rr/print/128_migm.html)

I saw and approached the hungry and desperate mother, as if drawn by a magnet. I do not remember how I explained my presence or my camera to her, but I do remember she asked me no questions. I made five exposures, working closer and closer from the same direction. I did not ask her name or her history. She told me her age, that she was thirty-two. She said that they had been living on frozen vegetables from the surrounding fields, and birds that the children killed. She had just sold the tires from her car to buy food. There she sat in that lean-to tent with her children huddled around her, and seemed to know that my pictures might help her, and so she helped me. There was a sort of equality about it.

Dorothea Lange (From: Popular Photography, Feb. 1960)

How does reading what Lange wrote add to her subject's story?

Photography:
Choosing the Lens of Perspective

Dorothea Lange's "Migrant Mother" Photographs in the Farm Security Administration Collection

(http://lcweb.loc.gov/rr/print/128_migm.html)

"Destitute peapickers in California; a 32 year old mother of seven children. February 1936."

Slide 2

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"Nipomo, Calif. Mar. 1936. Migrant agricultural worker's family. Seven hungry children. Mother aged 32, the father is a native Californian. Destitute in a pea pickers camp, because of the failure of the early pea crop. These people had just sold their tent in order to buy food. Most of the 2,500 people in this camp were destitute."

Slide 3

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"Migrant agricultural worker's family. Seven children
without food. Mother aged 32, father is a native Californian. March 1936."

Slide 4

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"Nipomo, Calif. Mar. 1936. Migrant agricultural worker's family. Seven hungry children. Mother aged 32. Father is a native Californian."

Slide 5

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"Nipomo, Calif. March 1936. Migrant agricultural worker's family. Seven hungry children and their mother, aged 32. The father is a native Californian."

Slide 6

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Questions on Dorothea Lange's "Migrant Mother" series

1. Briefly describe how each photograph is different compositionally.
2. Are these images (photographs) more or less powerful than the images (imagery) created through Lange's written account? Explain how Lange's choice of composition is similar to her choice of diction and syntax.
3. In what way do the captions add to the story told through the photographs?
4. Based on these photographs and written descriptions from Dorothea Lange, what are your impressions of central California during the 1930's? How do these impressions reflect your impressions of the contemporary American West?

Slide 7

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Visions of the American West: Film as Text

Grade Levels: 9 & 10

Introduction

This is one of several lessons in a unit which looks at multiple presentations of place as portrayed by the people who have encountered it. We will compare a variety of mediums to the cinematographer's frame which will stand as a metaphor for perspective, purposefully looking at the effects of what is shown "on screen" and what is excluded.

Objectives

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Use the terms and definitions connected with the discussion of film.
2. Analyze how elements of composition create the narrative in film.
3. Delineate the similarities and differences in choices made by directors, photographers, and writers.

Time required

three class periods (based on block scheduling)

Materials and Preparation

1. Copy of 1992 MGM film, *Of Mice and Men*, directed by Gary Sinise
2. Attached notes
3. Attached handouts
   a) Form for taking notes
   b) *Of Mice and Men* Cast

c) Facilitating Dialogue

Prior Knowledge

1. Students will need to have read John Steinbeck's novel, *Of Mice and Men*
2. Use of term IMAGERY in writing
3. Photography lesson in this unit

Procedure

1. Pre-discussion / pre-viewing questions:
   a) What is the best movie you've ever seen? What did you like about it?
   b) What is the worst movie you've ever seen? Why didn't you like it?
2. Think-Pair-Share: *Compare your responses. Do you and your partner have similar or different tastes in film?*
3. Facilitate discussion on film as an artistic medium. Identify terms connected to the discourse on film.
4. Give students handout to take notes on film.
5. View film. Students take notes on similarities and differences between novel and film.
6. Post-viewing questions:
   a) How do images in film relate to Lange's images in the "Migrant Mother Series"?

Extension / Enrichment / Assessment

1. Write an expository essay comparing the novel with the 1992 film version of *Of Mice and Men*. Emphasize use of literary and film terms in analysis.

Film Lesson: NOTES

Questions to consider:

Who makes the decisions in the creation of a novel? the author
Who makes the decisions in the creation of a photograph? the photographer
Who makes the decisions in the creation of a film? the director

Points to make:

- The director, like the photographer, decides what to include in the frame of vision and what to exclude from view.
- Like photographers, directors make conscious decisions about creating emotional responses in the viewer.
- More decisions need to be made in a film than in a still photo because you have 24 photographs per second of film.
- When you are analyzing a film, you are looking at the mise-en-scene -- how all the elements of a scene fit together (mise-en-scene: feeling or atmosphere)

Elements of cinematography:
lighting
music
visual effects
sound effects
choreography / body movement (language) / facial expressions
dialogue
color or black and white
volume of speech -- who talks the loudest
camera angle
camera placement
camera movement

Resources:
1. Ascher, Steven and Edward Pincus. *The Filmmaker's Handbook.* New York: Penguin Group, 1984.
2. Callan, K. *The Script is Finished, Now What Do I Do?* Studio City, CA: Sweden Press, 1993.
3. Dancyger, Ken and Jeff Rush. *Alternative Scriptwriting: Writing Beyond the Rules. Stoneham, MA: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1991.*

Of Mice and Men

As you view the film, take notes on differences between the film and the novel.

novel: written by John Steinbeck / published in 1937	film: directed by Gary Sinise / released in 1992

THE CINEMA

Of Mice and Men Cast

screenplay: Horton Foote

directed: Gary Sinise

released: 1992 Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Inc.

THE CAST:

John Malkovich ... Lennie Small

Gary Sinise ... George Milton

Ray Walston ... Candy

Casey Siemaszko ... Curley

Sherilyn Fenn ... Curley's Wife

John Terry ... Slim

Richard Riehle ... Carlson

Alexis Arquette ... Whitt

Joe Morton ... Crooks

Noble Willingham ... The Boss

FACILITATING DIALOGUE:
PHOTOGRAPHY, FILM, PAINTING & PROSE

PHOTOGRAPHY
CAMERA -- automatic vs. manual / quality
LENS -- zoom, macro, wide-angle, filter
FILM -- color vs. black and white, speed
COMPOSITION -- arrangement of images
LIGHTING -- contrast, color
ANGLE -- point of view, perspective
FOCAL POINT -- created with color, shapes, placement of objects in frame
DEVELOPING PROCESS -- chemicals, paper, timing / tint / cropping

FILM

PAINTING

PROSE

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